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ACTION EB-00

INFO LOG-00 ADS-00 INR-10 EUR-00 SS-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
H-01 NSAE-00 COME-00 L-03 EAP-00 FAAE-00 DOTE-00
STR-17 INRE-00 OCS-06 CA-02 USIE-00 JUSE-00 DS-01
E-01 /041 W

R 012357Z SEP 88
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8448
AMEMBASSY ULAANBATAAR POUCH)
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL SHANGHAI
AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU
AMCONSUL CHENGDU
AMCONSUL SHENYANG

UNCLASSIFIED BEIJING 25961

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E.O. 12356: N/A

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SUBJECT: CIVAIR: AIR MONGOLIA - THE "DO IT YOURSELF"
- AIRLINE

1. SUMMARY: THE RECENTLY INAUGURATED WEEKLY AIR MONGOLIA NON-STOP SERVICE BETWEEN ULAANBATAAR (U-B) AND BEIJING APPEARED TO US, AT FIRST BLUSH, TO BE SOMETHING ALONG THE LINES OF MANNA FROM HEAVEN. PRIOR TO THE EXISTENCE OF THIS FLIGHT, TRAVEL BETWEEN BEIJING AND U-B REQUIRED A 36 HOUR (ONE-WAY) TRAIN RIDE. THE EMBASSY'S EFFORTS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS FLIGHT, BOTH IN SUPPORT OF EMBASSY U-B AND TO FACILITATE TRAVEL OF DELEGATIONS TO U-B, HAVE ACHIEVED MIXED RESULTS, AT BEST. WE CANVASSED LOCAL AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN TO FIND THAT THEY TOO REGARD THE FLIGHT WITH SOME TREPIDATION. A TELEPHONE CALL TO THE MONGOLIAN EMBASSY IN BEIJING REVEALED THAT ALTHOUGH THEIR AMBASSADOR MOONLIGHTS AS THE AIR MONGOLIA REPRESENTATIVE, HE IS NOT AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT ON THE AIR SERVICE. END SUMMARY.

2. IN EARLY JUNE THE EMBASSY ATTEMPTED TO DESPATCH OUR FIRST OFFICIAL TRAVELER, THE RSO, VIA AIR MONGOLIA TO U-B ON A POUCH RUN. THE RSO ARRIVED AT BEIJING AIRPORT OVER TWO HOURS AHEAD OF THE SCHEDULED DEPARTURE TIME. UNABLE TO FIND ANYONE TO CHECK HIS LUGGAGE THROUGH TO U-B, THE RSO MANAGED TO OBTAIN A BOARDING PASS AND PROCEEDED TO THE INTERNATIONAL DEPARTURE AREA. HE WAS ASSURED THAT HE WOULD BE CALLED WHEN THE FLIGHT WAS READY TO DEPART. IN THE WAITING LOUNGE, THE RSO ENCOUNTERED SEVERAL TOURISTS ALSO WAITING FOR THE FLIGHT TO U-B, AND THE GROUP DECIDED TO WAIT TOGETHER. AS THE DEPARTURE TIME APPROACHED, THE RSO BECAME CONCERNED AND MADE INQUIRIES OF THE AIRPORT STAFF; HE WAS TOLD THAT THE PLANE WOULD TAKE OFF "SOON". ALMOST AN HOUR AFTER THE DEPARTURE TIME, THE RSO AGAIN ASKED ABOUT THE FLIGHT; HE WAS INFORMED THAT THE AIRCRAFT HAD ALREADY TAKEN OFF WITHOUT PASSENGERS OR CARGO. THE TOWER TRIED TO CALL THE PLANE BACK WITHOUT SUCCESS; IT WAS ONLY LATER WHEN FACILITATING THE TRAVEL OF TWO DELEGATIONS TO U-B IN AUGUST THAT WE BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND SOME OF THE PROBLEMS FACING AIR MONGOLIA.

3. ON AUGUST 22, TWO EMBASSY ECON OFFICERS ACCOMPANIED CODEL DORNAN AND STAFFDEL OLIN TO CAPITAL AIRPORT TO ASSIST THEM IN CHECK-IN AND BOARDING FOR AIR MONGOLIA (OM) FLIGHT 152 TO U-B. ALTHOUGH MOST AIRPORT PERSONNEL REPLIED ONLY WITH QUIZZICAL LOOKS WHEN ASKED WHERE TO BOARD THE FLIGHT TO MONGOLIA, ECONOFFS WERE ABLE TO FIND THE DESIGNATED DEPARTURE GATE (RIGHT NEXT TO A FLIGHT TO PYONGYANG) WELL BEFORE THE SCHEDULED 17:10 DEPARTURE TIME. (THERE WAS A BRIEF HOLD-UP WHEN AIRPORT PERSONNEL DISCOVERED THAT THEY HAD GIVEN THE CODEL AND STAFFDEL BOARDING

PASSES FOR THE NORTH KOREAN AIRLINES FLIGHT TO PYONGYANG, BUT THIS WAS QUICKLY RESOLVED.) HOWEVER, AS 17:10 CAME AND WENT, THERE WAS NO SIGN OF EITHER THE AIR MONGOLIA PLANE OR ITS FLIGHT CREW. AFTER ASKING THE AIRPORT PERSONNEL ABOUT THE STATUS OF FLIGHT OM 152, WE WERE TOLD THAT IT HAD JUST BEEN CANCELLED. NO REASON WAS GIVEN FOR THE CANCELLATION AND ECONOFFS WERE NOT ABLE TO CONFIRM THAT THE PLANE HAD ACTUALLY ARRIVED FROM MONGOLIA. THE ONLY INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN WERE TO TRY AGAIN TOMORROW AT 9:00.

14. BY THIS TIME, THE TWO DELEGATIONS HAD MET THE ONLY OTHER PASSENGERS WAITING FOR OM 152, FOUR AMERICAN BIG GAME HUNTERS GOING TO MONGOLIA FOR SHEEP HUNTING. NO ONE IN THE HUNTING GROUP SPOKE CHINESE, SO THEY JOINED UP WITH THE EMBASSY GROUP AND STARTED THE PROCESS OF LEAVING THE AIRPORT. SINCE EVERYONE HAD ALREADY BEEN STAMPED OUT OF CHINESE EMIGRATION, THEY HAD TO HAVE THEIR EXIT STAMPS CANCELLED. THE GROUPS' EFFORTS TO RECOVER THEIR LUGGAGE WERE UNSUCCESSFUL, AS AIRPORT PERSONNEL TOLD THE GROUPS, "YOU DON'T NEED IT".

15. AT 8:00 ON AUGUST 23, ECONOFF AGAIN HAD THE TWO DELEGATIONS AT THE DESIGNATED GATE READY TO DEPART ON FLIGHT OM 152. IN ADDITION TO THE TWO DELEGATIONS AND THE AMERICAN BIG GAME HUNTERS, THERE WERE ALSO ABOUT 10 JAPANESE TOURISTS WAITING FOR THE PLANE. (HOW DID THEY KNOW NOT TO SHOW UP FOR THE FLIGHT THE DAY BEFORE?) AIRPORT PERSONNEL ASSURED THE GROUP THAT THE FLIGHT HAD NOT YET ARRIVED FROM U-B, BUT WAS STILL EXPECTED TO DEPART AT 9:00. THE GROUP CALMLY WAITED.

16. AS 9:00 CAME AND WENT, ECONOFF STARTED TO PANIC. REMEMBERING EMBASSY RSO'S STORY, HE FEARED THAT THE TWO DELEGATIONS WOULD BE STRANDED. AT ABOUT THIS TIME, STAFFDEL OLIN AND ONE OF THE JAPANESE TOURISTS SPOTTED A SMALL TWIN ENGINE PLANE ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE TARMAC. AS NO ONE WAS ABLE TO IDENTIFY THIS PLANE AND THE AIRPORT PERSONNEL DENIED ITS EXISTENCE, ECONOFF DECIDED THE PLANE WAS PROBABLY OM 152, PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE. EXERCISING THE PRIVILEGES OF THE EMBASSY'S AIRPORT PASS, HE WALKED ACROSS THE TARMAC TO THE PLANE. THE PLANE, AN AN-24/PB, WAS THE AIR MONGOLIA FLIGHT. AFTER A BRIEF DISCUSSION WITH THE MONGOLIAN FLIGHT CREW, ECONOFF DISCOVERED THAT THEY SPOKE NEITHER OF HIS LANGUAGES - CHINESE OR ENGLISH - ONLY RUSSIAN AND MONGOLIAN. HOWEVER, THROUGH GESTURES AND NODS, ECONOFF WAS ABLE TO DETERMINE THAT THE PILOT WAS WAITING ON FUEL, PASSENGERS, AND BAGGAGE. BECAUSE THE MONGOLIANS COULD NOT COMMUNICATE WITH THE AIRPORT PERSONNEL, THEY DID NOT KNOW HOW TO GET ANY OF THESE.

17. AS EVERYTHING WAS RUNNING LATE AND THE MONGOLIANS SEEMED TO HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO GET WHAT THEY NEEDED, ECONOFF BORROWED THE BICYCLE OF ONE THE CHINESE AIRPORT STAFF AND WENT IN SEARCH OF FUEL, PASSENGERS AND BAGGAGE. FUEL WAS RELATIVELY EASILY FOUND AND DELIVERED TO THE PLANE. A BUS TO TRANSPORT PASSENGERS WAS MORE DIFFICULT. SINCE THE CHINESE AIRPORT PERSONNEL CONTINUED TO DENY THE EXISTENCE OF THE MONGOLIAN PLANE, THEY SAW NO REASON TO SEND A VEHICLE TO TRANSPORT THE PASSENGERS TO THE PLANE. AFTER A SHORT ARGUMENT AND ANOTHER BIKE RIDE ACROSS THE TARMAC, ECONOFF WAS ABLE TO CONVINCE THE AIRPORT STAFF THAT THE PLANE HAD ARRIVED AND THAT THE PASSENGERS SHOULD BE SENT OUT. AFTER A SLIGHTLY LONGER DISCUSSION THE AIRPORT STAFF AGREED TO SEARCH FOR THE BAGGAGE FOR THE PLANE.

18. EVENTUALLY, ABOUT 17 HOURS BEHIND SCHEDULE, ECONOFF (ON A BIKE) AND DELEGATIONS (IN A BUS) ARRIVED AT THE FUELED-UP PLANE. THE BAGGAGE ARRIVED SHORTLY AFTER. A SHORT ARGUMENT BROKE OUT BETWEEN THE MONGOLIAN FLIGHT CREW AND THE CHINESE BAGGAGE

HANDLERS; BUT, SINCE THE MONGOLIANS SPOKE ONLY IN MONGOLIAN AND RUSSIAN AND THE CHINESE ONLY IN CHINESE, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SAY WHAT WAS DISCUSSED. FINALLY, AT 10:25, FLIGHT OM 152 TOOK OFF FOR U-B. (ONE OF THE TRAVELERS LATER REPORTED THAT IN-FLIGHT SERVICE CONSISTED OF A STEWARDESS IN BLACK FISHNET STOCKINGS, A CHOICE OF BAD WINE OR VODKA, AND AN ANNOUNCEMENT -- SOMEWHERE DURING THE MIDDLE OF THE CIRCA TWO HOUR FLIGHT -- THAT THE PLANE WAS "SEVEN MINUTES FROM THE MONGOLIAN BORDER".)

9. OF THE AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN WHO ATTEMPTED TO FLY OR TO SHIP CARGO VIA AIR MONGOLIA TO U-B, THOSE WHO DISCUSSED THEIR EFFORTS WITH THE EMBASSY REPORTED A ONE HUNDRED PERCENT FAILURE RATE. CARGO, IN PARTICULAR, SEEMS TO BE DIFFICULT TO SHIP TO U-B. THE MONGOLIAN FLIGHT CREWS CANNOT READ THE ENGLISH/CHINESE CARGO MANIFESTS AND FREQUENTLY REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE BILLS OF LADING; THEY ARE UNABLE TO ASCERTAIN FROM THE CHINESE (DUE TO THE AFOREMENTIONED LANGUAGE BARRIER) WHETHER THERE IS CARGO TO BE SHIPPED; OR THE CHINESE REFUSE TO LOAD THE CARGO (ACCORDING TO ONE U.S. BUSINESSMAN) UNTIL AIR MONGOLIA PAYS SOME OF ITS LANDING AND GROUND HANDLING BILLS. THE SAME BUSINESSMAN COMMENTED THAT IN HIS (ADMITTEDLY BRIEF) EXPERIENCE, IT IS NOT UNUSUAL FOR AIR MONGOLIA TO DROP OFF PASSENGERS FOR BEIJING AND IMMEDIATELY TAKE OFF AGAIN (WITHOUT A RETURN LOAD) IN ORDER TO AVOID CHINESE AIRPORT OFFICIALS WITH DUNNING NOTICES.

10. ECONOFF CONTACTED THE MONGOLIAN EMBASSY TO LEARN THEIR SIDE OF THE STORY AND TO REQUEST A BRIEFING ON THE STATUS OF THE MONGOLIA-PRC CIVIL AIR TREATY. AFTER SOME DISCUSSION, THE MONGOLIAN EMBASSY OFFICER ADMITTED THAT THEIR AMBASSADOR ALSO SERVED (CLEARLY, IN HIS SPARE TIME) AS THE AIR MONGOLIA REPRESENTATIVE IN BEIJING, BUT WAS NOT AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT ON THE AIR SERVICE. THE MONGOLIAN DIPLOMAT SAID THAT HE WAS NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE EXISTENCE OF A CIVIL AIR TREATY BETWEEN MONGOLIA AND THE PRC, BUT WOULD BE HAPPY TO INVESTIGATE AND ADVISE FURTHER. HE FINALLY REFERRED ALL OF ECONOFF'S QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE AIR SERVICE TO THE MAIN OFFICE OF THE CIVIL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION OF CHINA (CAAC) WHICH SERVES AS AIR MONGOLIA'S AGENT IN CHINA.

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